

Making Tree Armor in the USA-

“From the start, Jill and I wanted to make Tree Armor in America,” says Jim Saunders, who along with his daughter, is the creator of this marvelous new product.”

“We completed the prototypes in 2009, and we must have spent 6 months visiting every plastic extruder in Pennsylvania & New Jersey. We engaged Lehigh University’s Ben Franklin Center, to design a partnership between a manufacturer and us, the vendor. In the end, we had to produce the product in China. Not one extruder offered to make the first 10,000 piece run for us, because they couldn’t come anywhere close to a price where we could market Tree Armor at a fair 4 dollar price. And, the Chinese route is less, but not cheap-when you add in the cost of Oceanic shipping, customs, taxes, as well as the Pre-production Inspection, Factory monitoring, and container load inspections that you don’t need when the product is made state-side.”

We learned that the high taxes, stubborn regulation, environmental controls make U.S. factories pretty uncompetitive. We thought it was more a labor issue than anything else, but we were wrong. The overhead really kills American competitiveness. We looked forward to a better business climate in the years ahead to make the next Tree Armor runs.”

Then in December, 2011, the Ben Franklin Center introduced Jim and Jill to a decades old company in the heart of America’s polymer industry, Strongsville, Ohio. The company, GSH industries was established back in 1986, and has made hoola hoops, plastic slinkies, hurdles for juniors, as well as lawn and garden equipment and auto parts.

Founder, Greg Hildebrandt, says “ like most American industries, we’ve seen a steady erosion of our business to the Chinese. Just recently, we lost a multi million dollar contract with an American car manufacturer that involved making the familiar cover you see under the hood that protects the electronics or battery compartments of new cars.”

“That’s why Jim’s venture is so intriguing to us,” Greg adds. “Here’s a product that was prototyped in China, & eventually made by the Chinese. Yet, with a concerted effort with Lehigh University, an American inventor and a U.S. manufacturer, we are adding, ‘proudly made in the USA’ to a product that was exclusively foreign until this year.”